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The Influence of the Living Christ:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

THE INSTALLATION

OF

REV. ELLERY CHANNING BUTLER

AS PASTOR OF THE

FIRST PARISH IN BEVERLY, MASS.,

MARCH 7, 1872.

BY

PROF. EDWARD J. YOUNG.

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BOSTON:

LEONARD C. BOWLES, 36 BROMFIELD ST.

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## DISCOURSE.

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I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God. — GAL. ii. 20.

IN the long line of saints and martyrs who have adorned the history of the Christian church, no name stands forth with greater prominence than that of the apostle Paul. A Jew by descent and a Hebrew in his faith, born in a Gentile city and having the rights of Roman citizenship, master of the Greek language and familiar with rabbinical lore, he accomplished the great work of carrying Christianity to the very centres of civilization and culture, and of bringing this Semitic religion to the Indo-European races. As a thinker, as a writer, as an orator, no one has surpassed him in power and persuasiveness, in glowing and impassioned utterance. Combining largeness of mind with intensity of conviction, fervent love with logical power, spiritual insight with practical wisdom, he has effected more for the cause of Christ than any single individual who has ever lived ; and as a theologian, a missionary, and a liberal Christian, he has given an impulse to the church, which it has not ceased to feel to the present hour.

But, remarkable as were his endowments and services, it is his character that most commands our admiration and reverence. His was a truly humble and consecrated soul. Conscientious and self-sacrificing, he was guided by the highest principles and he lived only to do good. Brave, noble, indefatigable, he was ready to go to the ends of the earth, to

encounter the extremest perils, to meet obloquy and scorn, preaching in the midst of Athens and Rome the gospel of the crucified Nazarene. No dangers could daunt, no threats or terrors could appall this intrepid advocate of Christianity.

How are we to account for this extraordinary spectacle? What was the cause of this fidelity and fearlessness, this eloquence and earnestness, this marvellous activity and unexampled self-devotion? What transformed this fierce, bigoted, persecuting Jew into the devout, catholic, Christian apostle? What sustained him as he encountered hatred and violence, kept him true to his high calling, and enabled him to fight single-handed against the world? Listen to his own explanation of the matter. "Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God. I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For me to live is Christ; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. The love of Christ constraineth us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." This is not the language of a visionary or a mystic, but of a strong, argumentative, practical mind. It is not the expression of warm, personal attachment to one whom he had known and loved on earth; for Paul had never seen Christ in the flesh. Neither have these words been invented and attributed to him; for their genuineness is unquestioned, and they are of an earlier date even than our gospels. They are the solemn utterances of personal experience and profound conviction, — the language of a high-spirited, manly, independent soul, who was once an avowed enemy of the new faith, but now is not ashamed to acknowledge Jesus as his Master and Lord.



This is not an exceptional or isolated example, but it has been repeated and confirmed in every age. The apostles, as the Book of the Acts shows, were conscious of Christ's power and influence, and they bore witness to his continued personal agency. Thousands of persons since in every land, the most heroic, patient, saintly ones that the world has ever seen, have confessed that Christ was the secret of their life and of their enjoyment of life ; that in him they have found inspiration, strength, peace, and that they owe to him what is best in their characters and lives. He has given to them a heavenly hope, an unspeakable bliss, and they have become new men by the divine grace that was manifested in him.

“ There are in this loud stunning tide  
Of human care and crime,  
With whom the melodies abide  
Of the everlasting chime :  
Who carry music in their heart  
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,  
Plying their daily task with busier feet,  
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.”

These individuals are conscious of having received a new love and a new life, and they are as sure of this as of anything of which they have knowledge. “ I say frankly,” declares one in our own day, “ that more than any recognized influence of my father or my mother upon me ; more than all the social influences of every kind, Christ has had the formation of my mind and my disposition. My hidden ideals of what is beautiful, I have drawn from him. My perfect conception of manhood is presented in him. I feel conscious that I have derived from him every thought that makes heaven a reality to me, and every thought that paves the road that lies between me and heaven. It is by the grace of God in Christ Jesus that I am what I am, in all my aspi-

rations and in all my hopes." This conviction has found expression in many of the sweetest hymns of the church ; while such minds as Augustine, Luther, Thomas à Kempis, Wesley, and hundreds of others have given the same testimony to the Saviour. It is as true to-day as when it was first written, that "as many as receive him to them he gives power to become sons of God."

What now is to be said of this long succession of intelligent, sincere and sober witnesses? We see a distinctive type of character, peculiar to those who have "been with Jesus," perpetuated from age to age, and still renewed in the church. These are facts, well-attested, numerous, and they demand some adequate explanation. We cannot ignore them. We cannot possibly suppose, that these great and wise and good men in all the centuries have been the victims of a delusion. No charlatan or impostor could continue to pass himself off for a king, and find men yielding so readily to his sway. Jesus has brought into the world a life that never was known before. No other person stands in a similar relation to his followers. No believer in any other religion has ever declared, "Moses liveth in me. I can do all things through Mahomet who strengtheneth me. The law of the spirit of life in Socrates has made me free from the law of sin and death. For me to live is Confucius ; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Buddha or Zoroaster." These men do not live to-day as Jesus lives. Who of them ever dared to say, "I am the light of the world ; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"? Jesus not only said this, but he has proved it. The history of the Christian church demonstrates that he has been in intimate organic connection with it. It is the spirit which has flowed from



him and which has been freshly communicated from age to age, that has animated his body, which is the church. No system of abstract truth, no mere historical record, no past existence upon the earth, can account for what we see to-day—his life reproduced in his disciples. Our relation to Christ is altogether different from that which we hold to any other. He is not a deceased and buried benefactor. We cannot think of him as dead. He ever liveth. He is not a memory, but an actual personal reality. He is not simply the past founder of the church, but he is now its living head. His ministry has not ceased, but it is still going forward in the world, and under him the church militant is to become the church triumphant. Christ thus verifies himself to us; and we are compelled to infer, independently of any written documents, that this new spiritual race must have had a new spiritual progenitor, a second Adam, who was not only a living soul, but also a “quickenings spirit.” A stream partakes of the quality of the source from which it flows; and such life-bringing and healing waters give evidence of some hidden spring, which has been flowing on through the ages, and which is perennial and inexhaustible.

This doctrine is not, in any respect, unreasonable. Do we not believe in immortality, that our friends continue to exist and think and love and act? They have not gone to a realm of shades, or to a world unconnected with this. Who shall say that they are distant from us, and exert no influence upon us? “Are they not all ministering spirits?” And shall we affirm less of Him, who was so closely united to God and so full of the divine life, whose heart so throbbed for the humblest of his brethren, and who prayed for all who should believe in him in coming time? Jesus must still be interested in the cause for which he gave his life, and he must

still be active in its establishment. Who shall define the sphere of his spirit and influence, and limit it by conceptions drawn from earthly relations? Must spiritual beings be subject to the same laws and conditions that are imposed upon the dwellers on this earth; and have the higher intelligences no more freedom and power than we who are confined in a material organism? Not until the end will Christ deliver up the kingdom to his Father. Now that he has passed into the heavens, the authority that was given him here he can exert on a far grander scale there. He can come to the hearts of his true disciples, as he could never come in the flesh; and he can exert an influence on the forces of society, sitting at the right hand of power, and carrying to its consummation that which he began on earth. This we are authorized to infer from his great personality, and from the proofs of his working in the world. This belief, which has been held by many of the ablest and freest minds,—by men like Schleiermacher, Bunsen, Rothe, Robertson, Channing, not to mention honored names among the living,—surely cannot be regarded as inconsistent with the highest reason.

If now we open the Gospels, we find in them frequent remarkable declarations which furnish the key to the experiences we have been considering, and confirm the truth that we have found. Jesus speaks with a profound consciousness that he is the Son of God and the Son of Man, in perfect union with the Deity and with humanity, and he affirms that he brings a new divine life into the world. He asserts that he is the truth and the life, that he is the living bread which came from heaven, that whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life. “As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and the Son quickeneth whom he will.” This was the purpose of his com-

ing, that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. He said, moreover, that there was a vital connection subsisting between himself and his followers, like that which unites the branches to the vine. He assured them that he would not leave them comfortless, but that he would come to them; that he would dwell with them, and abide in them. "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." These lofty sayings are not confined to the fourth Gospel. In the Gospel of Matthew we read: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Where two or three are gathered together in (for) my name, there am I in the midst of them. All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." These words, so calm, so elevated, so accordant with the dignity of the Christ, are as well attested as his parables and conversations. They do not bear the stamp of fraud or fiction. They are the natural utterance of that wonderful person, and the natural accompaniment to his wonderful deeds. Mysterious in themselves, they require the Epistles and the history of the church as a commentary, to show their meaning and their fulfilment. They affirm, in language which cannot be mistaken or explained away, that there is a personal relation of the believer to the Master, and a real presence of Christ in his church. The good shepherd knows his sheep; and he still leads his flock, including now those "other sheep" he has which were not of the first fold, and which he said he must bring in, that they might hear his voice.

The distinguishing feature of Christianity is not its teachings, but the person of its author, who embodied his religion and cannot be separated from it, and who is the medium of



divine life to the world. There is a tendency in our day to undervalue and ignore personality. The Deity, by some scientific theories, is resolved into an impersonal law or force. Man, as regarded by some writers, is only the product of his environment, the creature of circumstances, and is to be reformed by reforming his outward condition. Heaven, according to certain thinkers, is not a society, but only an inward state. In like manner, Christ is dissolved in Christianity. But it is the person of Jesus that stands with outstretched arms inviting us, not to come to his religion, but to come unto him. It is his person that has stamped itself upon his followers. This alone could have prompted affection, trust, devotion, and even martyrdom. Take this away, and you quench all enthusiasm and personal attachment, and you substitute a code of precepts for a living inspirer. Abstract ideas can never create the ardor and zeal, that the same ideas impersonated are fitted to awaken. We have all seen that, when the principles of monarchical government were recently discussed in England, comparatively little interest was manifested in the subject; but when the heir-apparent, the representative of those principles, was thought to be in danger, the whole nation rose up to testify its allegiance and honor. Christianity is not an intellectual system, and it is not to be fully known by thought. The study of the letter will not give it, and hence those who study only the letter do not find it. Many who have looked at it critically and disbelieved it, afterwards, when they have seen its working practically and experienced its influence spiritually, have accepted it. Jesus brings God directly to us, and thus gives us a higher power than our own. God dwelt in him and spoke by him and wrought through him, and he is a vehicle of divine influences, and life-giving currents go forth from

him to all who are in sympathy with his spirit. He was more than a prophet. He was greater than his disciples believed. They stood too near to him, and they could not understand him as we now may do. He has changed the world. He rules by divine right. Men may dispute about his nature and rank; and these questions will probably always remain in dispute. But none can deny his powerful and beneficent influence. No one can read history and ponder the great movement which he originated, without feeling that the claims which he makes in the gospels are only what we should expect in view of such grand results. And this is the most convincing evidence of Christianity. The inward witness, and the outward demonstration, are more cogent proofs than all the arguments that may be built up on the letter of the record.

If then, as scripture and experience attest, Christ is the medium of a higher life to the world, this truth is of the greatest importance. It is essential to the prosperity of the church.

Every association, school, party flourishes, so far as it is true to the ideas and spirit which gave it birth, and to the law of its growth. As long as there remain reverence and love for the founder of an institution, and faith in the principles which he represents, so long that institution will continue to exist. When, however, respect for him has died out, either through forgetfulness of his character and services, or an entire change in public sentiment concerning him; when there has been a new and wide departure from the original basis on which any corporate body has long stood, then that body will be dissolved, and a new one with a new name will take its place. We see this in the history of philosophy, where one school has followed another, as soon as the diver-



gence of the new one from the old was sufficiently marked. We see it in the history of literature and politics, where societies formed in honor of certain scholars and statesmen, or for the advocacy of certain interests, have survived only so long as these men were venerated, and these interests were deemed important to individuals or to the state. In like manner the Christian church has been truly prosperous only when there has been loyalty to Christ, and an acceptance of the truths which he proclaimed. Where do we find the highest spirituality and self-sacrifice, the most missionaries and martyrs, except where there is Christian faith and life? Where do we find churches that really grow and thrive for a long period, apart from Christ? If any man or any religious society abide not in him, it loses the vitality and vigor which come from him, and it falls away, like a withered branch, from the parent stock. The eclipse of faith, if it be permanent, results in the decline and downfall of Christian institutions. The church has always fought with enthusiasm and success under Christ's inspiration. As an army, so long as its general lives and leads them, marches on courageously, triumphing over every obstacle, but if he chance to fall it is dispirited and demoralized, so the victories of the cross have been won because there has been no doubt in regard to the great Captain of our salvation. Our leader has not fallen. Victor over the grave, he dieth no more. While some are questioning whether, after all, he was very remarkable and is worthy of a place in their Pantheon, we need only open our eyes to see how mightily his personal agency is working on the earth, how he has been the greatest force in all history, and how evident are the signs that point to the glorious establishment of his kingdom. He has been the animating

power of the church in every age. Creeds and rituals have changed ; but he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

The preacher, then, must not merely speak of doctrines and duties, but he must present Christ, the Christ of the New Testament, whom Mary loved, and John revered, and Peter confessed, and the magdalen sought, and the people followed. We want not simply truth, but love and life. He is the manifestation of God's love to men, and in him is life, divine, eternal. At the Lord's Supper we come nearest to him, and feel the magnetism of his personal influence. That is not simply a service of commemoration, but of communion. We meet not merely to honor a historical personage, who once lived and has passed away ; but we meet to hold fellowship with the Father and with the Son. Many of our Communion hymns expressly recognize this truth ; and thus the doctrine of a living Christ imparts warmth and fervor to our devotions, and vitalizes all our theology and all our life.

This doctrine is of prime importance also to the individual. We need such a friend, one who communicates to us the highest spiritual truth and inspires the mightiest spiritual motives, one who comes near to us by his human sympathy, and who lifts us up by his divine spirit. And we cannot know such a being, without being ennobled and purified by his holy friendship. The inward relation of Christ to us is far more important than his external, official relation. This Christian consciousness gives to him who has it an assurance of what he believes, which cannot be shaken. And when Christ has been formed within, there is a beauty and saintliness of character, and a depth of religious experience, which command our homage, and which are seen nowhere else. How many tried and suffering ones have gone through

life cheerfully and bravely, faithful unto death, through him who has enabled them to overcome the world ! We have all known such, whose life was hid with Christ in God, who walked even here in the outer courts of heaven, and who now follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

“ Yes, Loved of the Father ! thy spirit is near,  
To the meek and the lowly and penitent here ;  
And the voice of thy love is the same, even now,  
As at Bethany’s home, or on Olivet’s brow.” \*

This relationship to Christ is likewise the bond of all true Christian union. There must always be different opinions and institutions. But these should not divide Christians. The communion of saints includes those of every sect and church. One blood makes one humanity, in spite of varieties of race and nation. The apostles differed in their conceptions and representations of their Master and his work ; but they all were held to him, as to a common centre. It is love and loyalty to Christ that constitute a Christian. As we come to him, we come together. We cannot quarrel, if we have his life and his love. It is a most encouraging sign of the times that, as the spirit of controversy is disappearing, denominational lines are becoming fainter and fainter, and Christians are striving to draw nearer to the mind of Christ. Let us be united to him, and care not for sectarian names.

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\* From “ Hymns of the Spirit,” edited by Rev. S. Longfellow and S. Johnson, No. 652. In hymn 166 is the following stanza : —

“ In one who walked on earth, a man of woe,  
Was holier peace than even this hour inspires ;  
From him to me let inward quiet flow,  
And give the might my failing will requires.” •

See also a discourse on the “ Presence of Christ,” by Rev. Dr. C. A. Bartol, in his “ Discourses on the Christian Body and Form,” pp. 144-155.

Let us welcome all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Speculative opinions are of little moment, if the disciple can only say, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

A superficial observer, judging only from the bold attacks which are made upon Christianity, might imagine that it was losing its position in the world. But it stands securely upon its foundations. It has never lacked the assaults of able adversaries in every age; and it has survived them all. Some of those who have gone beyond it, have also outgrown their faith in God and in a future life, their belief in prayer and in moral obligation. The eyes of others, who do not receive Jesus, seem to be holden, so that they do not know him. There is yet to be a reviving and deepening of Christian faith, and a new appreciation of Christ and his truth. Destructive criticism has reached its limit. All the attempts to reduce the evangelic history, only show how much cannot be destroyed. What the assailants have been compelled to leave, stands like a peerless Torso, incomplete, marred, yet suggesting the grandeur of the original. Jesus can never be displaced from the affection and veneration of men. He will not recede in the world's regard. On the contrary, he is coming to yet higher honor, a more universal recognition, and a wider sway. During the late revolution in Paris, when the utmost hate and violence were manifested against the churches and the priests, the colossal figures which stand over the entrance of the church of Saint Augustine were fired upon by the vandals of the Commune. After the insurrection was suppressed, it was discovered that, while every one of the Apostles had been shot several times, the figure of Christ remained unharmed. So, likewise, after this contest shall have been ended, the person of Christ will be found



untouched by the assaults which have been made upon it, and will stand forth beautiful, symmetrical, perfect, and will win all hearts.

I rejoice with you, Christian Friends, that that image is to be presented here. May He, whom no picture or statue can adequately represent, gain your reverence and love ; of his fulness may you all receive ; and may you grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.





